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Milo Rediger Writings & Addresses

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### Drumbeat '76: "One nation under God"

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DRUMBEAT '76 <sup>sub-title</sup> "One nation under God".

I do not mean that this should be just some more bicentennial talk; there has already been so much of it that one wonders if history teaches only that we do not learn the lessons that history teaches. But as evangelicals in church and educational leadership, the gratitude we feel for our religious freedom in America's past is mixed with a lot of concern for the degree of government encroachment into many individual liberties.

We sometimes insist, and probably mistakenly, that our country and our constitution were founded on Christian principles. But they were built on principles and concepts that make Christian experience the likely if not the logical expression of man's religious nature. Those principles include the creation of man and the sovereignty of the people. Man's dignity derives from his origin, God the Creator, and the civil government derives its power from the sovereignty of God's creatures. This is the sense in which it is ordained of God, for as St. Paul says, "the power is of God". When men in government assume that they are in positions of power in their own right, we are already in trouble. And trouble we have had recently, *as we have drifted away from "one nation under God"*

As the bureaucracy increases and takes over more of the powers of a sovereign people, the concept that the government derives its power from the sovereignty of the people decreases. When, as in the last national election, only one third of the electorate goes to the polls, the concept of a sovereign people is declining. Both are related to the concept of creation. Like a treasure hidden in a field came the wonderful gift of democracy. No one dreamed that it was there or set out purposely to find it. It came up as the inevitable

consequence of a certain belief about the origin of man, the rights and dignity of the individual. Thomas Mann said, "Democracy is nothing but a political name for the ideals which Christianity brought into the world as religion." If anyone wants to question the accuracy of this appraisal, he should at least take the word of the people who hate democracy and oppose it. Karl Marx knew where democracy came from. "The democratic concept of man", he said, "is false. It holds that each man has value as a sovereign being. This is the dream, the illusion, the postulate of Christianity". Adolf Hitler knew it, too: "To the Christian doctrine of the significance of the human soul, I oppose with icy clarity the saving doctrine of the insignificance of the human soul". If we have forgotten our origin, those who hate it haven't.

We're having quite a hassle now on the subject of separation of church and state. What did the founding fathers mean by that? Where do the limits run? What is separated from what? Does the Constitution mean to exclude sectarianism from public education, or does it mean to exclude God from public life? Must our children stop addressing their prayers to the heavenly Father and in the future say, "To whom it may concern"? There is an area of vagueness here which will certainly have to be thought through carefully. (J. Wallace Hamilton, Serendipity, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965, p. 125-126).

In the gospel of John, chapter thirteen, it is made clear that the strong service orientation of Jesus as He washed the disciple's feet came from His "knowing that He had come from God and was going to God". The record is that, with these stabilizing poles of knowledge and assurance, He set about modeling and interpreting for the disciples what kind of life is fitting between the coming and the going. When government becomes something other than humble service to the people from whom it derives its power, it is no longer the arm of God in the

world. Jesus said that the greatest leader for us will be the truest servant among us.

There is a right and necessary relationship between government and our Christian institutions. Someone has phrased it this way: to limit powerful evil by law and strengthen impotent good by education. Evil is powerful as a result of Lucifer's fall, and good is impotent as a result of Adam's fall. The difference is the depraving and deteriorating impact of original sin. But Christ, by His sacrificial atonement, delivered us from the impact of Lucifer, and redeemed us from the influence of Adam.

Reich, in The Greening of America, gave a frighteningly accurate description of our state of affairs when he referred to the stupendous, mindless force that our federal bureaucracy has become, rolling inevitably over us as we helplessly struggle with the red tape and suffer the frustrations of uncoordination and contradiction. There are many good men and women in government positions, but no one seems to be able to slow down or change the course of the great rolling, mindless force. For example, one of the finest Christian brothers we have in Washington - whose name you would all recognize - is co-sponsor of the Child and Family Act, a bill that would put the care and education of our children in the hands of the federal government. He sees it as a way to help the many poor and disadvantaged who are now in low opportunity areas and circumstances. I couldn't love him more as a Christian brother, but I couldn't disagree more about this proposed legislation. I see it as taking away from the people - parents and local authorities - another precious right and freedom, too many of which we have already turned over to the bureaucrats. You see, he has the luxury of living with the noble - and sometimes Christian - federal legislative intent, while I have the misfortune of having to live with the less-than-noble



federal regulator's interpretation. And in our uncoordinated and fragmented system, that interpretation - often made by a tow-echelon person unfamiliar with both the legislative intent and the enterprise to which he is applying the statute - bears no resemblance whatsoever to the noble thoughts and persuasive arguments of the lawmakers. Furthermore, some experiences I have had enable me to say that the regulator or enforcer couldn't care less if his interpretation is not only contradictory to the intent of the law, but also inconsistent with every ounce of common sense God has implanted in the human mind.

I do not mean to speak cynically of the civil authority that is established by God, and I urge love and prayer for our leaders. But we have been exhorted to be wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves. This places a responsibility on us to see to it that the system does not destroy us in spite of the intentions of good men.

In the relation of church and state, the Christian, while respecting and obeying civil authority, marches to a different drumbeat. He understands that the key is "the power is of God", and there must be some semblance of unity between God and the law, else he finds himself in the dilemma of conscience, for the sake of which he is to obey civil governments. Then he must discern the issues in relation to the power, and be true to his highest loyalty.

So if this is the current character of our world, we can surely not settle for a job and a living wage. We have to be concerned with the issues that determine the continuance of religious freedom and the stability of those powers that enable us to live normal, fruitful lives and be at peace with all men, insofar as possible. What, then, can we do that is positive and helpful?

First, don't be discouraged by the overwhelming odds. It has been said, I am only one, but I am one; I cannot do everything, but I can do something; what

I can do, I must do; and what I must do, I will do. Even this humanistic approach lends something toward a contributive attitude. Add to this the reasonable optimism of the Christian hope, and you have a powerful combination. None can be so isolated as to leave all of the responsibility to others. You are only one, but you are one - one of God's creatures that has worth and dignity, and that counts. It matters what you believe and what you are and what you do.

Always since the fall of man, but more now than ever, we have been searching for anchors of understanding, for like highway signs along the road, giving direction toward some kind of meaning for living. Like the Dartmouth senior, in his valedictory address, expressed it, "After four years in college it seems absurd to keep on living. If anyone has found an alternative to futility, please write me a letter. My address is...."

There are alternatives to futility, and we find directions through the crises of our lives.

There is the crisis of identity; simply, we don't know who we are. Let me encourage you. You are something and somebody by creation. It is a simple fact-- God made you. This truth may get lost to you in the process of human procreation, birth and growth in a not-too-friendly environment. So by the time you become accountably aware of yourself, you are confused and lost. Here is a good starting point toward the first anchor of understanding--by creation you are somebody-- somebody with importance and dignity, at least to God, even if you and others don't perceive it yet. Two facts are interesting and helpful here.

One, Jesus Christ was aware of His identity, and it gave Him direction and meaning during His life on earth. John 13:3--"Jesus, knowing that He had come from God, and that He was going to God..." set about being and doing something important in the world--so important, in fact, that by what He was and did, we

are redeemed and saved for eternity.

Two, Genesis 1 and 2 outlines for us the order of creation. God remodeled the dark and distorted earth by working in an ascending order through light, vegetation, animal life to man, declaring man the crown of His creative activity. Christian missionaries and historians have reported that wherever people have not known about this, they have fallen to, and below, the living level of the other animals; pagans and heathen, in other words. But, thank God, we have this knowledge. Like Jesus, we know we have come from God and are going to God. This is a very solid starting point.

There is also a crisis in communication. In this technological age there is a great overemphasis on methods and media--often at the expense of message content. Marshall McLuhan goes so far as to say "the medium is the message". This, of course, refers to an important element in communication, but it is a radical overstatement.

There is a substantive message, and its content becomes the second solid anchor of understanding. Here it is: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." I John 1:5,6,7. What a personal, powerful message to you!

This is the crux of the search for personal wholeness and meaningful existence. Don't miss it!

Now, the crisis in authority. We have real problems at this point, don't we? There is a tendency to say, "This is how I feel about it and this is what I believe, and if I believe this, then I am not responsible to regulations set



up by someone else if they conflict with my belief or my personal desires". You see, what is happening is not so much a challenge of authority as such, but a dilemma in the choice of authorities. You have simply set up your own private authority over against any other.

So I ask, do you have a right to feel that way or to believe a certain way if it is in conflict with Christ's authority? If you claim that you do, then I ask, What are your credentials as compared with His? Freedom cannot exist without some authority, and when the alternatives are the authority of Christ or that of the individual's own private judgment, the choice for us is clear. So it is not the authority of the establishment, but of the Word of God, of Christ as revealed in the Bible, and all of us bend our will to His.

One more crisis, which I am going to call status. This again has to do with identity; we don't know who we are by redemption. This brings us full circle to the prior question of who we are by creation. To fulfill those implications, we now see that by redemption we are sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. John 1:12--"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." You are justified by faith, and that is your position, your status. Once, when Martin Luther discovered this truth, it started the whole Reformation. It's in Romans 3:24--"...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

If you can believe and appropriate this, then you can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a servant of God. As someone said, Have a drink at Joel's Place, a reference, of course, to St. Paul's exhortation, Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit, as Joel prophesied. And notice how Jesus personalizes this in warm, intimate relationships. Servant does not mean "slave",



as He says in John 15:15--"No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I call you friends, for all the things that I have heard from My Father I have shared with you. You did not choose me, but I chose you.--go and bear fruit---and this I command you---love one another."

How do we move from a Christian college out into the world of work? Prayerfully! Down in N.Y.C. a large new organ was being dedicated in one of the great churches. The special service featured a printed program listing Prelude, Scripture reading, Prayer, and then a special concert by the organ. Following the prelude, the organist discovered that the power was off. A technician was at hand, and notes were feverishly passed among the minister, the organist, and the electrician. While the minister read the scripture, the technician passed a note to the organist. It said, "After the prayer, the power will be on." It can be so in your life, too.